

ELECTRONIC LINGUISTICS

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ARTWEEK, Los Angeles, Dec. 6, 1980; Vol. 11, #41

Taka Iimura, the Japanese film and video artist is widely known for his work in film where he has concentrated on our perception of time and duration. As in his filmmaking, which seeks to arrive at the "fundamental components" of the medium, Iimura's videotapes, screened recently at the Long Beach Post-Production Studio, investigate the basic vocabulary of television.

For the past few years, Iimura has explored the structural relationships of language, using a closed-circuit video system. In a "self-referential" network of equipment where the image of a VTR camera ("observer") is fed back through a monitor ("observed"), a series of images is created which parallel in structure the syntax of the English language. Physically, the arrangements he favors utilize a basic VTR unit routed through a "switcher," two cameras and two monitors. Each camera is the focus on a monitor which, in turn, can display either live or prerecorded information.

In Iimura's attempt to relate image to language, the observer/camera(subject) becomes an integral part of both system and "sentence." He writes, "Unlike film, in closed-circuit video one can see the 'observer' (subject) and the 'observed' (object) at the same time." The artist considers this subject/object relation to be "sentence-like." In 1976 Iimura began using a linguistic model where the subject/camera ("I") can "see" the object/monitor ("you"), i.e., "I see you." By using this basic syntactical unit as a departure point for increasingly complex "sentences,"

the structural relationships between words, both written and spoken, and hardware could be explored.

In Iimura's work, the roles of observer and observed shift according to the description of the words seen and/or heard by the percipient. For example, if the picture reads "I" and an off-screen voice says "you," one's mode of perception is affected differently than if the picture reads "you" and an off-screen voice says "I." A Given image, whether considered linguistically or in terms of the hardware employed, is expanded to include the functions of both observer and observed.

Norman Yonemoto, an LA video artist, feels that the primary concern of Iimura's work is "educational," i.e., it provides "lessons in a visual language." The point of these lessons, besides refining a viewer's capacity for processing audiovisual information, is, in Yonemoto's estimation, to put oneself into a contextual framework where there is the possibility of "total self-referencing."

Traditionally, the West has effected a clear separation of the concept of "subject" and "object," i.e., Western man (subject) has chosen to dominate and restructure his environment (object) to suit his most immediate needs. In contrast, the East has been characterized for generations by a fluid interchange between "subject" and "object," i.e., an individual schooled in the ways of the East has little trouble assimilating objects into the self.

Iimura, a native of Japan, is challenging our basic assumptions about how we perceive the world around us - as expressed in the simple arrangements of words and images. While the structures employed by the artist would be nothing new to those interested in language and its veiled functions, the work seen as a whole reflects a personality committed to expressing the universal through the subtle relationships which, from moment to moment, escape us all.